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NEWS
FROM YOUR MUSEUM
THE ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM

Know your Museum better

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ANCIENT SPONGES AID "HYDRO"

Like many of the most valued things in life we are apt to take our Hydro Electric utility for granted. If we stop to think, we know, of course, that hydro power is due to the harnessing of energy from falls and rapids. But falls and rapids are caused in various ways. How, we ask, did Niagara Falls originate? Those of us who have watched the "Falls" at work have probably noticed that the water carried by the Niagara River from Lake Erie flows over thick beds of limestone, big blocks of which often break away and fall into the chasm below. Beneath this hard rock are softer shales. The "Falls" would not exist were it not for the heavy capping rock. It protects the underlying shales which otherwise would soon wear away.

How and when were these rocks formed that now serve us so well? Royal Ontario Museum authorities tell us that millions of years ago portions of a vast sea, teeming with sponges and lowly shellfish, covered southern Ontario, including the area now occupied by Niagara Falls. As time went on the sea gradually retreated leaving behind the limy oozes and muds which formed the ancient sea floor. These sediments subsequently became compacted into the limestones and shales described above. In the limestones are entombed the hard, glass-like skeletons of sponges which now often appear as chert balls or nodules. These chert balls do not dissolve as readily as the limestone and hence serve to reinforce the limestone layers which make possible the "Falls." Thus the remains of the lowly organisms of an ancient sea are playing their part in the economy of our present day industrial civilization.

PLEASE LADIES, WHAT NEXT!

"What field will they invade next?" asks the harried male, as he sees the womenfolk taking over job after job once exclusively performed by the stronger sex. The following tale will not add to his peace of mind but may help to solace him a little on the theory that misery loves company.

Since time immemorial it has been the unquestioned right of the buck deer to wear the antlers. Now all is changed. The Royal Ontario Museum recently acquired, through Mr. Frank MacDougall, Deputy Minister of Lands and Forests, an antlered white-tailed doe, from Algonquin Park.

Antlered does are not unknown, but usually the antlers are under-developed, malformed and frequently consist merely of two spikes. It is not so in this case, for the antlers are symmetrical in form, have a spread of nineteen inches, carry nine points and would equal or excel many heads of bucks so proudly displayed by the successful deer hunter.

Move over Mr. Man and make room in the dog-house for Mr. Buck to lower his once proud antlered head.

ONCE UPON A TIME, a beaver's pelt was the unit of currency in Canada. An exhibit in the Royal Ontario Museum shows the beaver to be, in effect, the builder of a nation.

INSULATE FOR WARMTH

Insulate for warmth, and if you can't insulate your house take a tip from the past and insulate yourself. A visit to the Royal Ontario Museum shows that padded clothes were worn in many parts of the world. In Europe our ancestors made great use of this practical idea. The ladies used to wear quilted petticoats to guard against the cold of their drafty, under-heated houses. An 18th century example made of bright pink silk, elaborately embroidered, is now on exhibition in the costume gallery. At this time men also used quilting, particularly for their waistcoats and dressing gowns. The Museum has recently been given an 18th century man's white satin dressing gown which is exquisitely and very finely quilted by hand.

INTRODUCING NEW BRITAIN AND NEW IRELAND

Far-away lands, New Britain and New Ireland, are the subjects of a new exhibit in the Royal Ontario Museum. Natural and man-made objects from these tropical islands introduce the Museum visitor to the strange environment where United Nations' soldiers now fight.

Both these islands are clothed with a luxuriant and varied vegetation. In the forests live gaudy, red-and-green parrots, brilliant fruit pigeons and handsome kingfishers. On the coral reefs that fringe the shores live bizarre and fantastically beautiful shell-fish. Some have deadly stings; the shells of others serve the native as money.

The dark-skinned natives are primarily agriculturists and fishermen. Their crops include taro, yams and bread-fruit. The dog and the pig are the only domesticated animals. Until a few years ago, stone and shell were used exclusively for tools and with these tools they skilfully worked with wood to make their houses, utensils and weapons. The weapons of modern fighting men—areoplanes, machine-guns, warships, etc.,—must seem strange indeed to these primitive people.

AMETHYST FOR FEBRUARY

The transparent, purple variety of the mineral, quartz, is called amethyst and is considered to be the birthstone for February. It is the most valuable of the large variety of semi-precious quartz gems.

In the Royal Ontario Museum there are large, deep-coloured amethyst crystals from Brazil. There are smaller, paler, crystals from Nova Scotia and Port Arthur, Ontario. Faceted stones of both types are displayed.

In amethyst the colour is not evenly distributed throughout the stone. It is therefore difficult to cut it to the best advantage, that is, to show the deepest colour. Attempts are usually made to get the darkest part at the lowest point of the cut stone so that it will show throughout.

This gem has always been associated with temperance and sobriety. In the past it was believed to cure or to prevent drunkenness. Since early times it has been used in ecclesiastical rings.